

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny Hoyer released the following statement today in celebration of Independence Day.

"Two hundred and twenty-eight years ago the Second Continental Congress unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence.

"More than two centuries after its composition, this nation-building document, just as Jefferson predicted on its 50th anniversary in his letter to Roger C. Weightman, towers aloft as 'the signal of arousing men to burst the chains...to assume the blessings and security of self-government' and to restore 'the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion.'

"Our celebration of the birthright of our nation is a day of fireworks, of barbecues and picnics, and of friends and families. But, of course this day is more than a time to light sparklers and gather for potlucks. It is an opportunity to reflect on our nation's history, our progress, and our future. We take this occasion to recall the principles on which our great nation is founded, to celebrate the spirit of freedom on which it is sustained and to recognize the common heritage that Americans value and share.

"When our nation declared its independence on July 4th, we created a blueprint for democracy that has not only vitalized our nation, but continues to inspire newly independent nations around the world as well as those who yearn for the freedoms we cherish.

"This week the United States proved again that it did not enter Iraq solely to occupy this nation. On Monday, we handed off sovereignty to an Iraqi interim government as a prelude to free elections expected in January 2005. Over the past year, thanks to the courage and determination of the men and women serving overseas, 25 million human beings who had been enslaved for a quarter of a century have been liberated. A dangerous dictator no longer menaces his own people or the world, but instead awaits the justice that he denied to millions. And it's because of their courage and sacrifice that the universal aspirations of all men and women - freedom, democracy and basic human rights - are being extended half a world away.

"Independence is rarely easy; it is an honor as well as a privilege, and sometimes, as happened at the birth of our nation, it is necessary that we fight for it. On this day, we would be remiss if we did not recognize and pay tribute to the men and women who have stepped to the fore when

they were needed and who have carried the American flag - and the principles and values for which it stands against the forces of tyranny and darkness.

"Hundreds of thousands of Americans have died in battle in the past century, and this is a time to remember them, and the millions more who survived, who returned to their families and lives, some with few physical reminders of their devoted service, others permanently disabled in the line of duty.

"As we remember their sacrifice, we must also resolve to fulfill the obligation the rest of us incurred with their sacrifice, to keep America free and strong.

"This Independence Day, as you celebrate with your family and friends, please take a moment to remember those brave men and women whose service gives us the opportunity to celebrate this day each year in peace and prosperity. Our nation was founded on principles of equality, of justice and liberty, and there is no more fitting time to exercise these principles in a manner that is so intimately connected with our nation's past, present, and future."

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